



The Millennium Development Goals:  
Why Every Woman Counts

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The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the concrete targets agreed to by the international community which provide millions of individuals with the agency to improve their lives. Fulfilling the objectives around gender equality contained in mutually re-enforcing declarations such as the Programme of Action at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo 1994, and the Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, is essential to achieving the MDGs. Another underpinning to this effort is the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, which mandates state parties to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms. CEDAW is furthermore the only human rights treaty which enforces the reproductive rights of women and recognizes culture and tradition as particularly influential when shaping gender roles and family relations.

By 2015, fulfilling the MDGs can save:
✓ More than 500 million people from extreme poverty
✓ More than 300 million people from hunger
✓ 30 million children from dying before the age of five
✓ 2 million mothers' from dying in child birth
✓ 350 million people from unsafe drinking water
✓ 650 million people from living with unsafe sanitation
<i>Source: United Nations Millennium Project. 2005</i>



Gender inequality cannot be achieved unless action is taken on multiple fronts. For example, efforts to improve women's reproductive health require access to quality reproductive health care and family planning services, as well as actions to address underlying issues of gender inequality in women's education, legal capacity, exposure to gender based violence, stereotypes and gendered divisions of labour within the family, as well as broader issues of macroeconomic policy and global distribution of resources.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) works with Governments, non-governmental organizations and communities worldwide to:

- Promote gender equality, equity and women's empowerment
- Ensure male involvement and responsibility in women's reproductive health;
- Provide quality reproductive health care services;
- Adopt a life-cycle approach to women's reproductive health;

- Address adolescent sexual and reproductive health needs;
- Prevent HIV and reduce factors that make young women and adolescent girls vulnerable to HIV/AIDS;
- Eliminate all forms of violence against women, including harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting;
- Use culturally sensitive approaches to achieve sustainable gender equality and build ownership within communities.

### *MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger*

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty, and the majority of people living on less than one dollar a day are women. Many poor women are either prevented to access economic opportunities or are subjected to working in low-wage informal jobs. Women are further not compensated for work performed in the household, and although women constitute more than half of the world's agricultural workforce, they rarely receive an income for the work performed. Globalization has further widened the gender gap, with women losing more jobs and benefits and being denied access to critical resources, making it difficult for them to break the cycle of poverty. Investing in women to increase their productivity and participation in society would naturally bring about larger benefits for society as a whole.

Poverty perpetuates poor health, gender inequality and rapid population growth. Poor health decreases women's productivity and participation in the labour force, and adds costs of treatment to the burden on already meagre incomes. Adolescent girls from poor households are more likely to marry and start childbearing early which disrupts their schooling and limits their future employment opportunities and economic independence. Women who cannot time and space their children find it difficult to invest resources into the health and education of each child, and thereby risk passing on poverty to the next generation.

### *MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education*

Educated mothers raise educated children, and educated children can break out of poverty. Allowing women and girls to attend and finish their schooling, promoting the value of educating girls and eradicating illiteracy among women has been shown not only to yield high returns for the girls themselves but also major returns for the development of the entire society. However, in order to secure women and girls' education, many cultural, social, economic and political limitations need to be addressed.

Ensuring universal access to reproductive health can play an important role in improving women's and girls' education. Enabling women to access to reproductive health empowers them to stay healthy, decide the number and spacing of their children, and affords them the time and space to go to school. The long term effects are the lowering of fertility and maternal morbidity and mortality rates

### *MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women*

By adopting CEDAW, the ICPD PoA and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action among other vital declarations and conventions, member states have committed themselves to ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment. This includes among other things strengthening opportunities for primary and post-primary education for girls, guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights for women, investing in infrastructure to reduce women and girls' time burdens, and guaranteeing women's and girls' property and inheritance rights, as well as eliminating gender inequality in employment, increasing women's share of seats in national parliaments and local government bodies, and addressing gender-based violence.

Because gender inequality is deeply rooted in traditions, attitudes and societal institutions, political commitment at the highest international and national levels is essential to bring about social change and allocate the resources necessary for gender equality and women's empowerment. This includes building governments' accountability for protecting women's rights and political participation. Gender budgeting initiatives are essential in order to secure greater investments in areas such as girls' education, sexual and reproductive health, women's political participation and in programmes to end gender-based violence.

#### *MDG 4: Reduce child mortality*

A mother's income, education and empowerment have been shown to have significant impact on her children's survival. Child mortality is highest when families are large, mothers are young, and pregnancies are unplanned and narrowly spaced. Children born to women who are lacking access to health care are more likely to die young than children born to women who enjoy good health and nutrition. Empowered and educated women help to counteract discrimination against girls in terms of nutrition, health and education. Providing women with access to quality reproductive health care helps space births, prevent early and unintended pregnancies and maternal deaths, provide proper pre-natal health care including nutrition and immunization, as well as attend to the care and wellbeing of women during delivery and the post-partum period.

Son preference and female infanticide are other practices that strike against female children and threaten their survival, and which cut across class and other socio-economic factors. It is therefore crucial to bring about greater awareness of gender-based discrimination and its consequences in societies where these practices exist.

#### *MDG 5: Improve maternal health*

Every year 529,000 women die from complications of childbirth or pregnancy, 99% of them in developing countries. Inadequacies and inefficiencies in health provision cause almost one third of illness and death among women of reproductive age. Maternal mortality and morbidity could be avoided if all women had access to proper reproductive healthcare services. Meeting the existing demand for family planning services would reduce maternal deaths and injuries by an estimated 20 percent or more.

Women's low status in society often leads to low investments in women's health and women and adolescent girls often lack decision-making power as well as the economic independence to gain access to life-saving reproductive health services. Women's education, income and

empowerment have also been shown to be crucial in lowering the rate of maternal mortality. Women who are empowered and educated enough to access the right information, nutrition, and healthcare services and to act on decisions regarding their health and well-being are far more likely to survive childbirth, than women who lacked opportunities for education and empowerment.

*MDG 6: Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases*

HIV/AIDS is a leading cause of death for adults of reproductive age, and women are increasingly affected, constituting half of the number of people living with HIV/AIDS..

Households affected by HIV/AIDS are more likely to be poor than those not affected by the disease, and women aged 15-24 are three times more likely to be infected by HIV than men of the same age. This reflects the uneven power relationship between men and women in both the private and public sphere of life. Women are not only physically more vulnerable to HIV infection than men, discrimination and/or violence limit their ability to negotiate condom use and access reproductive healthcare facilities. Particularly intergenerational sex and transactional sex have inherent unequal power-relations between partners, and makes it virtually impossible for women to insist on delaying sexual debut, abstinence, condom use, or to report abuse.

Creating opportunities for women's political and economic empowerment gives them the ability to seize control of their own lives, and prevents them from succumbing to trafficking and engaging in transactional sex. Breaking the silence and taboos surrounding sex can create a safe space for both men and women to access information about prevention and treatment for HIV/AIDS. For most women, reproductive health care services are the most accessible entry points for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, why investment in the areas of sexual and reproductive health are increasingly important.

*MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability*

Women often depend on natural resources for maintaining the survival and economy of the household, but are often restricted, through social or cultural customs or law, in owning, accessing or using resources such as land, water or equipment needed for food production. This exacerbates poverty and gender inequality throughout society. High fertility leads to high population growth and fragmentation of the limited supply of land. This in turn causes a non-sustainable use of resources and increased urban migration, causing people to live their lives in slums and abhorrent conditions. Empowering women, involving them in decision-making processes related to the environment, and providing them with equal access to land and control over resources as well as universal access to reproductive health services, including family planning, is critical to achieving sustainable development.

*MDG 8: Develop a global partnership for development*

Governments, NGOs, and the private sector worldwide need to work together in partnership in order to ensure the complete fulfilment of the MDGs. The Beijing Platform for Action explicitly commits governments and other international institutions to take proper account of gender equality considerations in their activities at the international level, and governments who make progress in implementing international conventions and declarations, such as the International

Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention against All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), experience a more rapidly growing sustainable development. Studies have found that gender equality has a considerable impact on economic growth. For example, the quality of human capital is greatly increased by providing women with education.

Unfortunately, development programmes concerning gender equality, population and reproductive health are massively under-funded. Despite an increase over the last couple of years, donors meet little over half of the targets for funding set at the Cairo conference in 1994. In March 2005, the international community reconfirmed the commitments made ten years previously in the Beijing Platform for Action, by pledging to further undertake action to ensure the Beijing Platform's implementation, while emphasizing the necessity of a full and effective implementation of both the Declaration and the Platform to achieve the MDGs. If the MDGs are to be achieved, much more funding and support for programmes ensuring gender equality, equity and women's empowerment along with access to quality reproductive health care need to be mobilized.

Implementing universal standards such as human rights in various countries demands partnerships on international and national levels, as well as great cultural sensitivity in order to enable local communities to obtain ownership of their rights. This is why it is imperative to continue working with communities and local, religious and cultural leaders to share knowledge, listen to their experiences and together advance towards the fulfilment of CEDAW, the ICPD Programme of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

**Selective Sources:**

"Access to Prevention: Closing the Gap," Global HIV Prevention Working Group, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2003

"Financing the ICPD Programme of Action: Ten Years Later," UNFPA. 2005.

"Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals," United Nations Millennium Project. 2005

"Pathway to Gender Equality – CEDAW, Beijing and the MDGs," UNIFEM, 2005.

## Achieving the MDGs: Why Cairo, Beijing and CEDAW are Essential\*

Millennium Development Goals and Targets	ICPD Programme of Action	Beijing Platform for Action	CEDAW
<p><b>1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day</li> <li>✓ Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger</li> </ul>	<p>Raise the quality of life for all people through appropriate population and development policies and programmes aimed at achieving poverty eradication, sustained economic growth, human resource development and the guarantee of all human rights.</p> <p>Particular attention is to be given to the socio- economic improvement of poor women, and to eliminate social, cultural, political and economic discrimination against women.</p>	<p>Develop gender-based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty</p> <p>Promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources, markets and trade</p> <p>Provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women</p> <p>Strengthen women's economic capacity and commercial networks</p> <p>Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination</p> <p>Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men</p>	<p>Eliminate discrimination against women to ensure the same rights for men and women in employment</p> <p>Ensure men and women's equality before the law, and in particular the same legal rights and capacities relating to contracts and property, as well as in all areas of economic and social life</p> <p>Ensure equality between men and women in marriage and family life and, in particular regarding ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property</p> <p>Ensure rural women equal treatment in land reform and access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities and technology</p> <p>Ensure that rural women enjoy adequate living conditions, especially in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, and transport and communications</p>
<p><b>2. Achieve universal primary education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling</li> </ul>	<p>Ensure that all women, as well as men, are provided with the education necessary for them to meet their basic human needs and to exercise their human rights.</p> <p>Improve the welfare of the girl child, especially in regard to health, nutrition and education</p> <p>Achieve universal access to quality education, with particular priority being given to primary and technical education and job training, to combat illiteracy and to</p>	<p>Ensure equal access to education</p> <p>Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training</p> <p>Develop non-discriminatory education and training and allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms</p>	<p>Eliminate discrimination against women to ensure equal rights between men and women in all matters pertaining to education</p> <p>Ensure rural women's right to obtain all forms of training and education</p>

	eliminate gender disparities in access to, retention in, and support for, education.	Eradicate violence against the girl-child	
<b>3. Promote gender equality and empower women</b>  ✓ Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015	<p>Achieve equality and equity based on harmonious partnership between men and women and enable women to realize their full potential, particularly in regards to involvement in policy- and decision-making processes and provision of the education necessary for women to meet their basic human needs and to exercise their human rights.</p> <p>Increase public awareness of the value of the girl child, and concurrently, to strengthen the girl child's self-image, self-esteem and status and improve her welfare, especially in regard to health, nutrition and education.</p> <p>Promote gender equality in all spheres of life, including family and community life, and to encourage and enable men to take responsibility for their sexual and reproductive behaviour and their social and family roles.</p> <p>Promote equality of opportunity for family members, especially the rights of women and children in the family</p>	<p>Ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice</p> <p>Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects</p> <p>Generate and disseminate gender disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation</p> <p>Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies</p>	<p>Embody the principle of the equality of men and women in national constitutions</p> <p>Abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that discriminate against women</p> <p>Adopt legislative measures to prohibit all forms of discrimination against women, and ensure that women have access to protection from discrimination through national tribunals and other public institutions</p> <p>Establish and/or strengthen effective national machinery to advise on the impact on women of all government policies, monitor the situation of women comprehensively and help formulate new policies and effectively carry out strategies and measures to eliminate discrimination</p>
<b>4. Reduce child mortality</b>  ✓ Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five	<p>Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which results in harmful and unethical practices regarding female infanticide and prenatal sex selection</p> <p>Promote to the fullest extent the health, well-being and potential of all children, adolescents and youth as representing the world's future human resources</p> <p>Promote child health and survival and to reduce disparities between and within developed and developing countries as quickly as possible, with particular attention to eliminating the pattern of excess and preventable mortality among girl infants and children</p> <p>Improve the health and nutritional status of infants and children</p>	<p>Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services</p> <p>Strengthen preventive programmes that promote women's health</p> <p>Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health issues</p> <p>Promote research and disseminate information on women's health</p> <p>Increase resources and monitor follow-up for women's health</p>	<p>Eliminate discrimination in the field of healthcare, to ensure equality between men and women in access to healthcare services, including those related to family planning</p> <p>Ensure women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary</p> <p>Ensure women adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation</p> <p>Ensure rural women's right to adequate healthcare facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning</p> <p>Eliminate discrimination in education to ensure</p>



	Promote breast-feeding as a child-survival strategy	Eliminate discrimination against girls in health and nutrition	women's access to educational information to help ensure the health and wellbeing of families, including information and advice on family planning
<b>5. Improve maternal health</b>  ✓ Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio	<p>Enable and support responsible voluntary decisions about childbearing and methods of family planning, education and means to do so.</p> <p>Prevent unwanted pregnancies and reduce the incidence of high-risk pregnancies and morbidity and mortality; make quality healthcare and family planning services affordable, acceptable and accessible to all who need and want them</p> <p>Improve the quality of family planning advice, information, education, communication, counselling and services</p> <p>Reduce greatly the number of deaths and morbidity from unsafe abortion, and improve the health and nutritional status of women, especially of pregnant and nursing women</p>	<p>Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services</p> <p>Strengthen preventive programmes that promote women's health</p> <p>Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health issues</p> <p>Promote research and disseminate information on women's health</p> <p>Increase resources and monitor follow-up for women's health</p>	<p>Eliminate discrimination in the field of health care, to ensure equality between men and women in access to health-care services, including those related to family planning</p> <p>Ensure women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary</p> <p>Ensure women adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation</p> <p>Ensure rural women's right to adequate health-care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning</p> <p>Ensure women's access to educational information to help ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning</p>

<p><b>6. Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS</li> <li>✓ Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases</li> </ul>	<p>Prevent, reduce the incidence of, and provide treatment for, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and the complications of sexually transmitted diseases such as infertility, with special attention to girls and women</p> <p>Ensure that women and men have access to the information, education and services needed to achieve good sexual health and exercise their reproductive rights and responsibilities.</p> <p>Address adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues, through the promotion of responsible and healthy reproductive and sexual behaviour, and the provision of appropriate services and counselling specifically suitable for that age group</p> <p>Prevent, reduce the spread of and minimize the impact of HIV infection; to increase awareness of the disastrous consequences of HIV infection and AIDS and associated fatal diseases, at the individual, community and national levels, and of the ways of preventing it; to address the social, economic, gender and racial inequities that increase vulnerability to the disease</p> <p>Ensure that sexual and reproductive health programmes address HIV infection and AIDS</p>	<p>Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls</p> <p>Take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women</p> <p>Promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources</p> <p>Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services</p> <p>Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives to address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health issues</p> <p>Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making</p>	<p>Eliminate social and cultural stereotypes and practices based on gender inequality</p> <p>Eliminate all forms of gender-based violence against women</p> <p>Eliminate discrimination against women to ensure the same rights for men and women in employment</p> <p>Ensure men and women the same legal rights relating to contracts and property</p> <p>Ensure equality between men and women in marriage and family life</p> <p>Ensure women's equal access to health-care services</p> <p>Avoid discrimination against women in national strategies for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS</p>
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<p><b>7. Ensure environmental sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources</li> <li>✓ Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water</li> <li>✓ Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020</li> </ul>	<p>Ensure that population, environmental and poverty eradication factors are integrated in sustainable development policies, plans and programmes</p> <p>Reduce both unsustainable consumption and production patterns as well as negative impacts of demographic factors on the environment in order to meet the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs</p> <p>Facilitate the demographic transition as soon as possible in countries where there is an imbalance between demographic rates and social, economic and environmental goals, while fully respecting human rights.</p> <p>Incorporate the perspectives and needs of indigenous communities into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the population, development and environment programmes that affect them</p>	<p>Involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels</p> <p>Integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development</p> <p>Strengthen or establish mechanisms at national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women</p>	<p>Take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles that rural women play in the economic survival of their families</p> <p>Ensure rural women's right to participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels</p> <p>Ensure that rural women have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes</p> <p>Ensure that rural women enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications</p>
<p><b>8. Develop a global partnership for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory.</li> </ul>	<p>Achieve an adequate level of resource mobilization and allocation, at the community, national and international levels, for population programmes and for other related programmes</p> <p>Ensure that international cooperation in the area of population and development is consistent with national priorities and serves to promote national capacity-building and self-reliance</p> <p>Urge that the international community adopt favourable macroeconomic policies for promoting sustained economic</p>	<p>Review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty</p> <p>Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making</p>	<p>Ensure women the opportunity to represent their governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations</p> <p>Ensure women the right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy and to hold public office and perform public functions at all levels of government</p> <p>Ensure women's right to participate in non-</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Address the least developed countries' special needs.</li> <li>✓ Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems</li> <li>✓ Develop decent and productive work for youth</li> <li>✓ Provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries</li> </ul>	<p>growth and sustainable development in developing countries</p> <p>Clarify the reciprocal responsibilities of development partners and improve coordination of their efforts, and develop long-term joint programmes between recipient countries and donor countries to improve and strengthen policy dialogue and coordination of population and development</p> <p>Strengthen the partnership between Governments, international organizations and the private sector in identifying new areas of cooperation, and promote the role of the private sector in service delivery and in the production and distribution of high- quality reproductive health and family-planning commodities and contraceptives</p>		<p>governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country</p> <p>Ensure rural women's right to participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels</p>
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\*Selective provisions from each convention and declaration.